

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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THROUGH THE RANKS.

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CHAPTER VII. WITHOUT LEAVE.

DRUMMER COGHLAN had led a somewhat chequered existence. In the courts of Love his conduct had been too ardent, and disaster had resulted. In this manner. A certain Corporal of the regiment died, leaving a widow—in truth no novice to the sorrows of bereavement, since she was in the habit of designating the said Corporal as "Number three." It will be seen at once that there was something attractive about the lady in question. To sum up these charms it may be said, she was a neat, trim, bustling, dark-eyed little woman, who kept her home—such as it was—as clean as a new pin; she was sober, industrious, and devoted to the regiment in which she had already enlisted three times. It was said that once, during one of her short widowhoods, a certain daring civilian had "offered marriage," with such results to himself that he was found sitting on a stone outside the barrack gates, weeping bitterly, with a bump the size of a duck's egg on his head, the mark of the too zealous application of a broom-handle. It ultimately transpired that, in a frenzy of indignation, the fair one had asked him with frantic sarcasm, "What he took her for, to think she'd desert the old regiment, and take up with a fool of a civilian as didn't know how to put his feet to the ground?"

This was after her second venture. Again she took the shilling; and again was left lamenting. On the morning after the Corporal, with shriek of fife and roll of

drum, and many black-clad females following on, had been laid to rest, the widow presented herself before the Colonel at Orderly Room. Drummer Coghlan also presented himself, looking mighty solemn, but not one whit abashed, and supported by his comrade, who kept saying "Drat the woman" in a blood-curdling whisper at intervals, and passing the back of his hand across his mouth as if haunted by dreamy visions of the canteen. The widow was also accompanied by a friend, who kept imploring her to "hold up," and "keep up," and "be calm now"; the widow looking infinitely demure, dressed in a neat suit of black, but not in weeds. She "never wore them things for any of 'em, and wasn't goin' to begin now," she said, "but paid respect where such was doo, an' didn't grudge a bombazine at one-and-nine, nor make complaints of cost of ribbing with a neat satin edge." Her appearance, therefore, in consequence of this noble disregard of expense, was beyond reproach; and her demeanour matched her dress.

She spoke in a clear, pleasant-toned voice, looking the fiery Colonel calmly in the face.

If you please, she wished to put in a crime against Drummer Coghlan there. Her feelings had been that harrowed and hurt as words would fail to tell if she spoke for a blessed week, and the gentlemen had patience to listen to her.

The Colonel glared—a habit he had, which meant absolutely nothing—and asked her, kindly enough, to put her complaint in as few words as possible.

She knew, and every woman as stood the Hundred and Ninety-Third regiment knew, they had a friend in the Colonel—God bless him! They knew he wasn't one to see them put upon or belittled—

not he! Here an impatient wave of the Chief's slender, finely-formed hand, and a grunt from the Major standing by, stayed the stream of her eloquence.

"Can't you do as you're told?" put in the Adjutant, speaking in a mighty different voice from that in which he whispered soft nothings in the ears of the fair ones at the Castle balls.

The widow gave never a glance in his direction. In the presence of the Colonel of the regiment she recognised no others, charmed they never so wisely. She wished to put in a crime against the drummer there; he had "acted unseemly" to her. She was a desolate, unprotected, lone woman with no husband at her back; she claimed—with confidence—the protection of her Colonel.

"What did the man do?" said that potentate, tapping the orderly-room table with a gold pencil-case.

Well, it was thusly: when she and her friends were standing round the "open grave" of her late husband, and the Chaplain was reading the good word over him, that varmint there, he tore the fly-leaf out of his blessed prayer-book, wrote on it with a pencil, and had it passed round to her, the bereaved and sorrowing widow. Here she showed every sign of being about to shed a tear, and the friend who accompanied her exhorted her audibly "not to give way."

"Well, and what was on the paper?" said the Colonel, as grave as a judge, and glaring round officers, non-coms., clerks, and privates, to be sure that no covert smile lurked anywhere.

"If I must take my dyin' oath, sir, these were the very words:

"Give me first chance. Your devoted lover,
JIM COGHLAN."

And it's more than any decent woman can stand, please, sir, to have her feelin's jumped on, and trod on, and hurt that way, so it is."

Drummer Coghlan's explanation was simplicity itself.

"You see, sir," said the accused, "the article was good, and shure and enough I knew the bidding would be brisk, so I'd a mind to get first chance; an' no offence meant at all at all, an' sorry if any's taken, saving your presence."

"You have behaved in a most—ahem!—unseemly manner——" began the Colonel, still glaring, and stonily severe of demeanour.

"Shure an' I'd no manin' of that soart at all at all," put in poor Coghlan, at which the Adjutant thundered: "Silence!" and the orderly-room clerks shook in their shoes.

"You have conducted yourself in a most improper manner," commenced the Colonel again; and by the fierce and threatening looks of the bystanders, Coghlan was kept in silence. "You must make an ample apology for what you have done, and——"

"I shall, sir; it's myself will do that same, gladly," roared the too ardent lover; "an' it's sorry I am this day if I vexed the lady, an' humbly I axes her pardon."

The Colonel evidently condoned the interruption for the sake of the frank penitence it expressed. He tapped the table—gently—with the gold pencil-case, and smiled; yet so guardedly that no one dared follow suit.

Drummer Coghlan had not, however, said his last word; and, like the postscript of a lady's letter, this last word contained the cream of the whole matter.

Drawn up to a rigidity of "tenshun!" almost impossible to describe in words, the rejected suitor delivered himself of his pithy valediction to the Court assembled:

"It's all right, sir; I can see I'm forgiven by the tear in her oi. All the same, begging yer pardon for my bouldness in shpakin', she moight go further and fare worse."

With a sudden jerk, suggestive of being pulled from behind, Drummer Coghlan disappeared from view, while the Colonel was taken with a fit of coughing, and requested an orderly clerk to close a side window, from which, it might be presumed, a draught made itself felt; the man obeying with a face like a mute at a funeral, but managing to tip a wink with the eye next the wall to a comrade near, who presently burst into a violent and apoplectic fit of sneezing.

Orderly Room over, and the virtuous relict duly escorted by sympathetic females to the quarters that would still be hers for the three months during which a tender Government houses and feeds the bereaved one, fearful sounds began to proceed from the ante-room, while the Sergeants' mess-room was equally uproarious.

In the former, Lieutenants Blizzard and Verrinder were laid out straight on four chairs, calling imperiously for brandies and sodas; while in the latter, the Scotch Sergeant who reigned supreme at the hospital had crossed from his own

comfortable digging, taken a seat among his hilarious compeers, and—smiled; afterwards proceeding to order a foaming beaker of ale, as if to support nature under such an unusual display of emotion.

In the hospital, when the Sergeant smiled, the orderlies sniggered; on the very rare annual occasions when he laughed out loud, they roared, frightening timid patients. Drummer Coghlan was decidedly droll; therefore the canny Scotchman smiled, and the Sergeants' mess was irradiated. The last touch of the episode—that parting shaft of love, which hinted to the Corporal's widow that perhaps, by her fastidiousness, she was losing a good thing—was almost deserving of a laugh, indeed quite; but the day was warm, and the Sergeant could not rise to the occasion. Meanwhile the Colonel had entered the ante-room. Blizzard and Chubby started to their feet, suddenly grave as judges, but at the sound of the Chief's hearty "By Gad!" and heartier laughter, their merriment broke out again, and the incident of Drummer Coghlan's indiscreet wooing became established as a regimental "good story," to be told and retold as occasion might require. At the end of her three months' "maintenance," the Corporal's widow became again a wife, and, at the time our story opens, had attained to the high but, in my opinion, very undesirable elevation of quartermaster's wife—that is, one with the rank of an officer's wife, but none of the social position; too often, indeed, a woman of no friends, dwelling upon a debateable ground that is arid and drear, where no sun shines, and no fair flower blows. She was not one to thrust herself forward, and have to be held at arm's length—not she—but it may be doubted if there were not times in that trying to live up to a position thrust upon her by the promotion of her worthy husband from the ranks, when Drummer Coghlan's Parthian shot was called to mind, and she wished herself back among the simple friends of old, and would have been glad to have taken a turn and had a good gossip at "the tubs."

His unlucky amatory adventure made Drummer Coghlan a hero in a certain small way. There was a daring about the thing that pleased. He was, indeed, a most gay and cheery-hearted soldier, and embarrassingly popular with the children of the regiment, so that to pass along the married quarters was somewhat of an ordeal.

"Arrah, now," he would say to the procession that gradually gathered at his coat-tail, "don't be followin' on after me as if I was a volunteer in a country town. 'Tain't as it ought to be, an' me one as serves Her Majesty, an' wears a number on me cap! Have more conduct, now, the lot of ye!"

But "the lot of ye" didn't care a straw. They shouted to one another, "Here's Coghlan come, hurry up now and see him." And so the procession grew, and the married men, lounging at their doors with tunics unbuttoned, forage-caps on the back of their heads, and pipes smoking, laughed and said it was "a pity Jim hadn't a few kids of his own, and wouldn't he make the grand father now?" while the women, with rosy arms flecked with snow-white suds, looked out at their doors and laughed too.

Seen through the eyes of the children, the handsome drummer's attractions were indeed transcendent. Was he not the happy possessor of three exquisite beings called Marmozettes—things with frills round their necks like ladies, and sleek tails, striped in alternate black and grey? Was it not one of the supreme sensations of life to hear this trio chatter, and whinny, and watch them thrust tiny furry fingers into the recesses of Jim's pockets to search for a stray nut or sweetie? Then the names these wonderful creatures owned to—Shadrach, Meshach, and little Abednego—"for shure, they come out o' the land that's loike a burnin' foiry furnace," Jim would add in explanation. Abednego was the most entirely entrancing of the three; also by much the smallest, indeed could crouch into the palm of your hand, lifting a tiny elfin face, with great pathetic eyes, from a bundle of grey fur and a curled-round tail. Was it any wonder the children of the regiment followed Drummer Coghlan? Might there not always be the delightful chance of Shadrach lurking in a tail-pocket, or little Abednego showing a wee nose-tip from his master's waistcoat? It was only when Coghlan was in the negligence of "undress" that these accidents could happen, for at other times the three marmozettes inhabited the innermost recesses of his doubled-up cot, and had grown so 'cute from long experience of the service, that they dived and ducked at the sound of the inspecting Sergeant's footsteps, and had been seen to take a sly peep at his retreating form. Nor was admiration for Coghlan's pets

confined to the children of the married quarters. The diminutive son of the senior Captain was wont to point and say "monkseys," to the vast admiration of his family, when he saw the owner of those animals taking his walks abroad; and as to "little Missy," why, every one knew how her gentle heart clung to them! Who, then, was "little Missy"?

If you had asked that question of any one in the Hundred and Ninety-Third regiment, that person would have stared at your lack of the most ordinary knowledge. When the buglers bugled, they stared up at Major Henneker's quarters; when the fifers fifed as the sun went down, the young rascals flung up an eye to the casements without stirring their sleek heads the hundredth part of an inch; and many times and oft a small figure in white, with sunny head held coquettishly on one side, and little hands clasped, and falling against her Kate Greenaway robe in front, looked daintily out of window at her "sojer boys" below. Little Missy may be best described as an "unexpected blessing." The Major's daughter was tall and shapely; his two stalwart sons were launched in life; all traces of a nursery had finally disappeared from the home, and then—little Missy came, like an angel, or a butterfly, or some lovely bird that settles down upon a garden unawares. Nobody had got over the surprise even yet. She was their wonder, their miracle, their dear delight and joy. Even Mrs. Musters had a smile for Missy, and in the very act of hoping they would not spoil the child completely, spoiled her most atrociously herself.

To deny anything to little Missy—who would be so bold? And so "the world went very well" for Mrs. Henneker's wee daughter; the said daughter being a precocious, quaint-mannered, and dignified little creature, as is often the case with these late-born children.

Behold, then, one night, when the bright summer was just past its zenith, Drummer Coghlan, crossing the innermost barrack square, the quarters of the married officers, finds himself confronted by a ghost; quite a small ghost, it is true, but white as milk, with little, noiseless, pearly feet curling up over the stones, and a golden head shining in the moonlight. Drummer Coghlan stood still; but on came the ghost, and presently stood at his knee, boldly clasping his left leg with two small hands.

"They're gone to a party—every one," said the ghost in a clear, small voice,

perfectly self-possessed and singularly composed, the while she let go the scarlet-striped leg to open her arms ever so wide, so as to duly express the amount of people who had absented themselves from her abode that evening.

"I am being quite triumphant. I am doing as I like," she continued; but in spite of her "triumphant" frame of mind, little Missy—her own fair name of Coralie was quite lost to fame—cast swift and furtive glances at the house, where the lightless windows told of the absence of the family.

Drummer Coghlan was terrified to see that his young companion was attired in the very slight costume of one long white night-dress, the which she had now gathered artistically in one hand, so as to give her little pink feet fair play. A cascade of hair like spun gold hung down her back, glittering like a river of gold. Her eyes—the angels have such eyes as little Missy, darkly violet in the tender moonlight, grave, steadfast, sweet beyond things of earth—looked up into his appalled countenance. Drummer Coghlan, being a staunch Catholic, though, perhaps, not a very devout one, was fain to cross himself and mutter an invocation to Saint Joseph, that favourite saint of the people.

"There's first post," said the little one, as the air was suddenly cut by the acrid notes of a bugle. "All my soldiers must come in and go to bed. Do you know, Mr. Drummer, what I saw the other night? I am very triumphant when I'm by my own self. I do what I like. I got out of bed and stood on a chair at the window, and I saw one of my soldiers come over the wall there, at the little corner there. He was just like my cat—my Minnymin, you know—he sat on the wall, and then he felled down and fled away."

Coghlan was at his wife's end; was he not listening to rank blasphemy out of that baby mouth?

"Heaven save us, Missy, and the holy saints be wid us this night an' day, there isn't a man stands the Hundred and Ninety-Third as would do the like."

"There was," said Missy, standing tall and slim upon the stones, her head thrown back proudly. "You are a wicked story, Mr. Drummer Co'gan, an' I shan't be friends with you any more. I haven't told nobody but you. It's a secret—and you are wicked to say it isn't true. Why shouldn't the soldier be like Minnymin if he liked to?"

Coghlan's cap was off, and his hair, of which the parting was a miracle, all rumpled up in an agony of amazement.

"Save us all!" he ejaculated at last, "to break out of barracks, an' them er—er—er—hem!—Fenians drillin' on ivery hillside, an' thimselves the spawn o' the divel an' all his hosts, savin' yer little ladyship's presence in the namin' of the gentleman."

"Oh, don't mind," said Missy. "I don't—I don't want to talk any more about the soldier on the wall, he's getting tiresome. What I want to know is this: where is little Bednego? I want to see him so very badly—I do indeed."

"If Missy will let me lift her up and carry her over the stones, and take her safe home to good Eliza, I'll go and fetch Bednego this blessed minute," said Coghlan promptly, with all a soldier's readiness to take advantage of a weak place in the enemy's outworks.

"But how did you know my nurse's name was 'good Eliza'?" said Missy, with unlooked-for quickness. "And she's not always 'good Eliza,' she's sometimes 'bad Eliza' when she worries me, and makes tangles in my hair, and won't let me do what I like. Did she tell you her name was good Eliza?"

Night was merciful, and veiled the drummer's blushes.

"Never you mind," he said, stooping over the child and gathering her in his arms; "just you let me carry you home, Missy. Harken now, the first post is done—all good people should be abed."

A long-drawn-out, lugubrious note—the last of the three that are supposed to say, "Come ho—me," had died away; but the ring, though distant, of many footsteps broke the silence. The men who had been out and got no pass for later hours were returning; laughter and voices could be heard, and mingling soon with these came shrill cries and calls, and a flying figure was seen coming from the Major's house with arms wildly extended, and cap-streamers flying.

"Look at 'Liza," said little Missy, with quiet contempt, "what a fuss she is making!"

To this Drummer Coghlan found no reply ready. His heart was beating beneath his tunic at such a rate, that had little Abednego been lurking there, the creature would have been frightened to death; his tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth, and really, when

Eliza came rushing up to him, kissing and clutching the child, and calling on Heaven to bless the brave soldier who had saved her darling from possible death and disaster, the poor man was in sad case, and—after the manner of his kind, who always resort to the empty sound of strong language in moments of keen emotion—proposed for himself an appalling future, and still meekly carrying little Missy, followed good Eliza to her master's house, and at length set his pretty burden down upon the dining-room table.

"Well?" said Missy, looking gravely into his face, and totally ignoring the fact that Eliza was narrating a tearful story of how she had found her young lady's blessed bed empty, and run distracted-like all over the house, and lastly out into the square.

Then Coghlan capitulated at once, said he wouldn't be a minute fetching little Abednego, and Missy, with a sedate "I'm glad you're going to keep your promise, you know," set herself to wait with what patience she could muster. She even let 'Liza put a natty cape about her shoulders, and slippers on her bits of feet, and put a stool upon the table for her to sit in state, enthroned like a queen, and then Coghlan came back.

But for a while, Missy could not make out where "Bednego" was one bit. She put out her precious hand and touched Jim's side-pockets, and fearfully pinched the flap of his coat, but no Bednego appeared. At last, however, she gave a squeal of high delight, and not unpleasant fear, for there, clinging wildly about Coghlan's waist, was a slender, grey furry arm with little prehensile fingers.

"Oh, fetch him out quite entirely—do, dear Mr. Drummer, do. Can I spread him same as I spread Minnymin—will he mind?"

Then, with her head on one side, and her divine eyes looking up imploringly:

"I don't think he'd mind if I spread him. . . ." This with a deep sigh of longing. . . .

"He'd ought to be proud of it, Miss," said Coghlan, bringing the unwilling little animal, who held on like grim death to his master's garments, into full view. What a pretty little fellow he was; so sleek, so shy, so soft and downy! His frill gave him a knowing look; his eyes were big and bright; and with what a meek, long-suffering gaze he gently submitted to be "spreaded," that is, laid

out straight on his back to his fullest extent, and so held like Minnymin!

"He likes to be spreaded," said Missy, regarding him with great complacency; then, with a sigh of satisfaction, "so does Minnymin."

Perhaps it was just as well that the gift of speech was denied to the individuals in question, otherwise Missy might have found herself in a minority; as it was, there was no one to contradict her, and soon she had little Abednego cuddled up to the breast of her nightgown, with his tail confidently curled round her arm. Not only so, but Eliza fetched a clear white grape from the pantry, and oh, what joy to see him eat it!

Then both Missy and Abednego grew sleepy, and faintly protesting, but for all that with her tired head falling on to 'Liza's shoulder, the former was carried back into the nest from which she should never have flown; and the latter, taking one spring into Major Henneker's special chair, would have rolled himself up into a ball to rest, if Coghlan had not caught him deftly, and let him curl into the open flap of his coat.

The night was balmy, though a trifle crisp, and Coghlan stood at the open door awhile, until presently 'Liza tripped down the stairs, after which time began to run a race at a quite ridiculous speed, and the great gong apparently went mad.

"I'll have to be after going," he said at last; "but look here, my girl, will I put my name down for 'indulgence'? There's always a lot of men wanting to be married 'with leave,' an' be jabers! it's myself is among the lot! Hoots, toots! just look at the thing fair now, an' commune wid yerself over it—not forgettin' you'd see the other two craturs an' little Abednego all day an' ivery day—an' what more can I say than that, acushla?"

What, indeed! Surely the prospect was enough to dazzle any girl's eyes!

Drummer Coghlan was in a state of high glee. They had laughed at him at the canteen four years ago over his disastrous affair with the Corporal's widow; but he'd have the laugh on his side this time, anyway, for there wasn't a neater, sweeter, more respectable girl in all Cork City than little Missy's good Eliza. She'd make a lovely wife entoi'rely.

Here Jim pulled out a shilling from his pocket, looked at it, and slipped it back again. Then his soul bubbled over in song:

"I'm keepin' them all for 'Liza,
I'm keeping them every one;
I'm keeping them all for 'Liza,
And we shall have lots of fun.

What's that?"

Drummer Coghlan was passing by the little corner, the crafty little corner where the shadow fell so thick in spite of all the moon could do, and "that" was a sound like a cat scratching in a drain—scratching stealthily, too, as if afraid of being heard.

Coghlan came to a full stop. He might have been a wooden soldier for any stir there was out of him. The scratching went on, and then a dark figure crouched in an angle of the wall where it leaned up against the hospital, and dropped.

"Harry Deacon, an' you in your stock-in' feet!" hissed Coghlan, with an oath; and there stood Norah's lover, a white-faced, trembling creature, his boots slung round his neck by a string, his eyes staring and bloodshot. If any ghastly memory of that scene in the big square on a day when the summer was young, and the triangles braced for use, came into the minds of the two men thus face to face in an awful moment, be sure no word was spoken; only Deacon shrank back, till he stood against the wall, holding up his hands as if in dumb appeal.

"Tell me this," said Coghlan at length, drawing his breath deep as he spoke: "are ye a Fenian, a traitor to our lady the Queen, an' a disgrace to the coat on yer back? or have ye been out on the drink an' missed post? Tell me the truth, or I'll shake the sowl out o' yer body."

"I've bin—on the drink," panted Deacon, yet did not speak like a drunken man.

"Where will ye be if I report ye to the guard, you drivelling fool, eh?"

"Don't do that, Coghlan; don't do that," said the other, his dark eyes wild and gleaming like those of a hunted animal. Then, with a deep, muttered curse, he shrank back behind his companion as a tall, swinging figure came out into the moonlight from the direction of the hospital.

"How did he come here? Is he a devil with two shapes?" whispered Deacon, still shrinking back.

"Divil!" snapped Coghlan. "What divil?"

"The Adjutant—the Adjutant."

"When it comes to not knowing a Sergeant's uniform from an officer's mufti, your case is bad, my lad. You're not far off the blue horrors in my opinion, Private

Deacon; an' we'll see you wi' a shaven crown before long, and wid no sinse in ye to spake of. Be off home wid ye, an' make no more ado. It's riskin' me stroipes for ye I am, Deacon; an' only for the sake o' the poor gurl Norah an' her purty face I'd not be after doin' it at all at all. But don't go staring that way at Colour-Sergeant number one company and callin' him Adjutant and such like, or they'll be giving ye up for a first-class Government lunatic, be jabers, an' lettin' ye have free maintenance for nothing all the rest o' yer days."

Meanwhile, in one swift glance, Gentleman Jack had seen and taken in the position; seen, and passed on. It is only those who know their soldier-world who can gauge what this action on the part of a non-commissioned officer meant. Undetected, a slur upon his own conscience, a something to bring the red blood rushing to his brow; found out, loss of rank, disgrace, and shame.

He muttered as he walked: "Again, again, poor lad, he has been caught and trapped; and I—what have I done? . . . Given my honour away, played the traitor, . . ."

The sweat stood upon his brow; his dark eyes were full of pain.

"Am I mad," he said, "that her eyes haunt me like this—that her voice is ever in my ears? 'For Norah's sake,' that was what she said to Harry as I passed. I heard her—'for Norah's sake.' Ah, the dear heart! but what am I that I should think of you like this, my gentle lady? You are far above me, as the stars that shine there in the far-off blue. Still, to spare you pain, I have given my honour—my honour. . . ."

THE OLD ROAD TO TUNBRIDGE WELLS.

JUST seventy years ago, the date 1823, we have it in the culprit's own confessions, a small boy from Charterhouse, at seven o'clock one beautiful August morning, was to be seen awaiting the drawing up of the stage-coach for Tunbridge Wells at the sign of the "Bolt in Tun," in Fleet Street. There is still a "Bolt in Tun" in Fleet Street, though stage-coaches depart from it never more, and you would seek there in vain the measure of early purr, or the beaker of rum and milk, such as started the early traveller of those days on his way with

roseate visions. Not that our Charterhouse youth was thus early depraved; he had the honest appetite of his age, he was breakfastless, and he had spent all his pocket-money, but he was in possession of a certain sum entrusted to him to deliver to his respected parent. The voice of hunger prevailed over the voice of an over-sensitive conscience. He breakfasted on coffee and hot buttered toast, broke into the trust money to pay the score, and went on from one thing to another, till in later life he came to write "Vanity Fair," "Esmond," and, declining greatly, "The Virginians." The last, however, is most to our purpose, for perhaps the freshest and best of its pages show how Harry the headstrong began his career of pleasure at Tunbridge Wells.

But here is the coach at hand with its prancing tits, the swell coachman on the box with shiny hat; the fable may be narrated as well of '93 as of '23, only in these days the coach gives us time for our breakfast, and apologises for starting so early as ten-fifteen a.m. from Charing Cross, on the score of the distance to go and get back in time for dinner. And the guard sings out "All right!" and the stable-boys snatch the sheets from the horses' quarters, and away goes the coach. Is it over London Bridge among the dim little shops of '23, where the yawning shop-boys are taking down the shutters, past the Marshalsea with its prisoners, and the King's Bench, where raffish-looking captives wave a salute from the grated windows; where the country carts are coming in, with post-chaises, and the early mail with its winding horn? There is a turnpike by the "Elephant and Castle," and soon appear the hedgerows and the wispy trees, that suggest perhaps the tufted palms of the desert and the tinkling music of the "Caliph of Bagdad."

Or shall it be over Westminster Bridge in '93, with the roar of traffic in the ears, and the jingling of the tram-car bells, drays and waggons rumbling, and costermongers bawling over their wares in the roadside markets. All is London still, noisy, brisk, and cheerful, till Lewisham is reached with its long high street stretching along the Tunbridge road. And Lewisham holds out hands to Bromley with hardly a break in the ranks of houses and villas. It is all High Street, London; but how pleasant after all with bright parterres of flowers all along, with shrubs and lawns and gravel drives all in the extreme of neatness and

propriety ! It is Amazonia, too ; all the men are away picking up gold and silver in the City. There is hardly a young fellow left to play tennis with the girls, and a hush is over everything, broken only by the tinkle of Maud's piano, or the baying of Nero in the paddock.

On the right lies Hayes, where in the big house by the church lived the great Lord Chatham, and where the still more renowned William Pitt, his second son, was born. Farnborough comes next, hardly notable for anything except that its church was blown down in a high wind in 1639, and was replaced soon after by the present edifice. A little to the south, in a pleasant secluded nook, is the house where Dr. Darwin lived and carried on his profound biological experiments. Here is all health and wealth, with pleasant country scenes along the way. But in 1823 the road must have been somewhat lonely, and the coachman or guard might here have entertained the passengers with stories of the highwaymen of former days, to whose haunts we are now approaching.

For here the country assumes a wild and broken aspect, with glimpses every now and then of summits crowned with groups of trees, and of wide, indefinite prospects opening out. The highest summit, at some distance from the road, is known as Knockholt Beeches, and commands the vast wooded plain that lies to the south, another part of that vast forest of Anderida that we have before encountered in making our way to the coast. There is a sort of gloom and mystery about the ravine into which we make an abrupt descent, that recalls the Spanish sierras ; and there is a kind of appropriateness in learning that once the road was haunted by a bold highwayman who was known to the world at large as Spanish Jack. In his own country he bore the sonorous title of Bli Gonzalez de Granez, and was born at Alicante, of reputable if not noble parents. But taking to evil courses, he escaped the alguazils of his native land by taking service on a British man-of-war. After serving some time in the navy, and forming an acquaintance with some "pressed" men from the Sussex coast, Jack took the opportunity of joining a strong band of smugglers who had their head-quarters at Hawkhurst, on the borders of Kent and Sussex, and who carried on their traffic in tea, tobacco, spirits, and foreign silks and lace, almost without concealment. In this way he became acquainted with the chief

highways in Kent and Sussex, and doubtless, with a train of pack-horses, had often passed through the defile before us, with a sharp look-out for revenue men, who rarely ventured, however, directly to oppose the march of such well-armed and determined desperadoes. But after a time Jack wearied of this too regular life, and began to operate on his own account as a highwayman, riding a good horse with sailor-like recklessness, and eluding capture by the celerity of his movements. Still he was caught at last, and executed in 1756.

A contemporary of Jack's was William Page, who was dreaded by the fine people who in coach or on horseback made their way to the fashionable Wells. "You will ride with us to Tonbridge, nephew Warrington, and keep us from the highwaymen," quoth the Baroness Bernateln, who for her further protection had a couple of men-servants with pistols and blunderbusses mounted on the box of her carriage. Page's method was original and ingenious. He turned out in his own phaeton and pair, fashionably dressed, and with the air of a man of "ton," took the road to the Wells, or some other fashionable resort, and at some convenient by-way turned off, altered his dress, put on a black cut or grizzled wig, saddled and mounted one of the phaeton horses, and pistol in hand rode off. Then it was "your money or your life" at some carriage door, with the inmates of which, perhaps, just previously the highwayman had exchanged polite salutations. The women shrieked, the men swore, but all handed out their purses, for it was known that the highwayman's challenge was no empty formula. Then back to his carriage, and presently, perhaps, overtaking his late victims, William vows that he has been stopped by the same scoundrelly highwayman, and urges pursuit on the tardy patrol. Then to dance that evening at the Wells, in the best of company, or returning to town, to the masquerade at Madame Cornelys' in Soho Square. But this fondness for good company was William's ruin, for after the masquerade one night a pretended Countess robbed him of five hundred pounds, and in his rage he made a vow that henceforth he would only rob women. But as ladies with fat purses were not too plentiful, he soon had to abandon this course. Still frequenting the masquerades, the fine gentlemen gamblers he met stripped him of all his winnings ; so that, becoming reckless, he was captured and hanged at Maidstone, A.D. 1758, and his carcase hung up by the

roadside for the comfort of the fine people who passed on their way to and from the Wells. What a story he might have written of the "Adventures of a Phaeton"!

These cheerful stories carry us down into the formidable ravine, which proves to be no other than the charming little nook of Riverhead, with Madam's Court Hill, "of bygone celebrity for highway robberies and coach accidents," and perhaps not altogether a delight to cyclists of the present day. For it is something of a climb to the level of the plateau on which stands Sevenoaks, that cheerful and thriving little town, which owed its original importance, and, indeed, its existence, to the great highway on which it is aligned. For it is not only as the way to Tunbridge and the Wells, but as the ancient route to Rye, that the road is of importance—Rye that in Elizabeth's days was the great port of communication between Protestant England and the Huguenots of France; Rye where Elizabeth herself often watched the embarkation of her soldiers, destined for the aid of the good cause, and where her ally, the "great" Henry, once proposed to visit her from the opposite shore for the pleasure of kissing her hand; Rye that is still the metropolis of the Marsh, and the once great citadel of smuggling.

It is impossible to leave Sevenoaks without a visit to Knole Park, with its grand groups of noble beeches and its time-honoured mansion. There is interest enough about Knole to occupy a long summer's day, for the house, originally built as a palace for the Archbishops of Canterbury, shows samples of every architectural device from the sixteenth century down to our own; and, as the home of the Sackvilles for the greater part of that time, has been stored with curios of all kinds and art treasures in abundance; and as an example of a grand mansion of the seventeenth century—with much of its original furniture in situ, its ponderous state beds, once gorgeous with cloth of gold and splendid devices, its hangings and tapestries, its galleries, ball-rooms, drawing-rooms, halls, and innumerable staircases—is a thing hardly to be matched anywhere, at home or abroad.

In leaving Sevenoaks, you get a splendid prospect as the road descends in a maze of unexampled richness and beauty, and a turn reveals the vast plain of the Weald, with the wooded heights that rise between us and the dim aerial downs

that bound the distance. But when we bottom the descent we feel that we have come into a different region. A drowsier land it is, this of the Kentish Weald, and the air with us, as with old Lambarde, "seemeth somewhat thicke," a rich, languid air that tends to reverie and general indolence; and of this somnolent region Tunbridge is the capital, with its tufted Castle hill, and the soft Medway flowing beneath in many languid channels, and a rich, malty, nappy flavour in the air. Yet the boys seem alive enough as they come whooping out of the gates of the old grammar school, while rooks are cawing overhead, and the steam-pipe of some neighbouring brewery gives forth a monotonous hum. Many people would like to see the Castle, but it is kept secluded as a "bonne bouche" for the Archaeological Society, which visits it every five years or so, and listens to learned papers thereon. But there is not much left after all of the grand old Castle that held out against the Red King and his English levies—just a fine thirteenth-century gateway, and some broken walls of the keep, about which it is hardly worth while to disturb the repose of a quiet English household. There is not as much to be seen of the mother Castle of Brionne in the pleasant valley of the Rille in Normandy, for which Richard de Clare obtained it from the Crown in a pleasant primitive method of exchange. A rope was run round the Lowy or League of Brionne, which was the special domain of the Castle, and as much measured off round the tufted hill above the Medway. But this method of dispensing with scribes and parchments can hardly be quoted as a happy precedent, for with their Castle the De Clares came in for a troublesome dispute with the see of Canterbury, which claimed the lordship of town and Castle, and for such a potentate the rope's end was not an available argument. The later history of the Castle connects it with the Staffords, who made it an occasional residence; first that Duke of Buckingham who fell in the Wars of the Roses, A.D. 1549, and then that unlucky grandson whose head was "off'd" by Richard Crookback, and the no more fortunate son of his "poor Humphry Bohun," decapitated by Henry the Eighth; all these may have entered in state beneath the heavy-browed arch of the old Castlegate.

When Tunbridge is passed there is nothing to attract attention but the pleasant country highway among farms,

cottages, snug county mansions, hop-gardens, parks, and chases, till you reach Southborough, with its church picturesquely placed on a breezy common. And here it was that the first visitors to the Wells, after their waters had become famous, pitched their tents, or had their lodgings in the cottages that presently were built, "little clean and convenient habitations," writes Count Hamilton, "that lie straggling a mile and a half round the Wells."

With the town itself in sight, there is little more to be said about the road. But if unhampered by the exigencies of coach and horses, there is another way to the Wells from Sevenoaks, more interesting, perhaps, although a little longer, and not such easy going. It is through a country well wooded and rather wild, and the road passes through Watts's Cross, where there are a few houses, but no traditions as to who Watts may have been, or where the Cross comes in, whether in commemoration of his murder, or only of his overseership of the parish. And there is Stocks Green, which speaks for itself as a warning to vagrants; and then we come to Penshurst with its snug inn and pretty village, and the church hemmed in by ancient timbered houses, under which is the gateway to the shaded churchyard. The fine old baronial mansion of Penshurst Place is open to the visitor at stated hours; with its hall of the fourteenth century, showing the "louvre" in the roof by which the smoke escaped from the central fire of logs. The minstrels' gallery is there over the screens which conceal the entrances to the butteries and kitchens, and, indeed, all the arrangements of the old feudal mansion may be studied here. The main building is of a fine Tudor character like the Sidneys themselves, who were but plain country gentry till Sir William, who fought at Flodden, raised the family to distinction. Then they came to be Earls of Leicester, and gave their name to Leicester Square; but their chief claim to posthumous honour after all is in their brave sons and fair daughters—Sir Philip, the poet and gallant soldier; "Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother;" sweet Saccharissa, Waller's flame; and Algernon, the martyr for the "good old cause."

And we may visit Sidney's oak, which is shown near the pond called Lanarp Well, without feeling strong conviction of its really being

That taller tree, which of a nut was set
At his great birth, where all the muses met,

and the same of which Waller sings as he declares his love for Saccharissa:

Go, boy, and carve this passion on the bark
Of yonder tree which stands the sacred mark
Of noble Sidney's birth.

Still, an oak planted at Philip Sidney's birth would be in full vigour at this time; though from Ben Jonson's allusion to a nut—which an acorn is not—and Waller's injunctions to the boy, which in the case of an oak would involve the destruction of a good many pocket-knives, one would be inclined to guess that the original tree was a beech.

After Penshurst there is one more village to pass, Speldhurst, which is like any other Kentish village, and then you reach the Wells, through an environment of new houses and villas. But after all, which is not often the case, the entrance to the Wells which most impresses the imagination is from the railway station. For you arrive in a cutting, bringing with you the "thicke" air of the Weald mixed up with smoke and steam, and from this subterranean nook you mount higher and higher like Jack on his Beanstalk, and then come out upon a region so utterly different from that you have quitted, that everything appears bright and exhilarating. The air is so sweet and delicate, the ways of the place so quiet and easy; the rustle of the leaves in the shaded Pantiles seems to bring the whole eighteenth century back again—the fine gentlemen in cocked hats and perukes, the painted, patched, and powdered dames, the fresh country lasses with their baskets of eggs and butter.

The spring still bubbles forth, but unnoticed, in its granite basin, but there are no dippers there to claim the welcome penny from the new arrival. Yet it is said that in the morning early visionary figures may be seen wending their way to the well, the fiddles are heard in a slender thread of harmony, the doctor with his silk small-clothes and gold-headed cane parades solemnly among the visitors, and the parson in wig and gown exchanges smiling salutes with the ladies.

In the days of the Merry Monarch the Wells were gay enough, and a good observer and judge of manners, the Count Hamilton, in his memoirs of Grammont describes it as "the place of all Europe the most rural and simple, and yet at the same time the most entertaining and agreeable. Everything there breathes mirth and pleasure." He describes the Pantiles as a long walk shaded by spreading trees,

with shops plentifully stocked, "where there is raffing as in the Foire de St. Germaine." He is taken, too, with the young, fair, fresh-coloured country girls, with clean linen, straw hats, and neat shoes and stockings, who sell game and vegetables, flowers and fruit. But with this fair, rural background what a jumble of queer figures in front! The Queen is there, but is hardly a cheek upon the wild pranks of the courtiers. Buckingham is there,

That life of pleasure and that soul of whim,

and in his most frolicsome humour, that spared nothing human or divine from which he could extract a laugh; and merry Nell is there with the players, as a foil to whom the tall, dry, hard-favoured Prince Rupert is the unconscious butt of the sardonic laughter of the crowd. Beautiful Miss Hamilton is there, too, with her friend, the fair Mrs. Wetenhall, and Lady Muskerry, about whom Buckingham exploded in "feux de joie" of jokes. And the "belle Stuart" was of the party, whose beauty of form is preserved for us in the Britannia of the halfpence, but who was as wild as the rest, if not as wicked.

But if there was mirth and music and feasting among the Assyrians, the tents of Israel were pitched not so far off. Indeed, there has always been a strong Puritan element about the Wells, and on the adjoining heights of Ruethall gathered a number of solid, wealthy citizens, their handsome wives and fair daughters, with a sprinkling of favoured divines, for prayer and exposition. Among these last was Dr. Annesley, an ejected minister, with a bevy of lovely daughters, one of whom, the youngest, became the wife of the Vicar of Epworth and the mother of John Wesley.

Another generation succeeds the roysterers and saints, the sons of Belial and the children of grace. All is decorous now, and a little formal. Your pleasures are set before you in a regular schedule with a list of prices. On the first morning after arrival you are early saluted by the music. For this civility you have to pay half-a-crown or more. Then you must proceed in a suitable undress to the public walk, drink and pay the dippers. After that enter yourself at the assembly room, at the coffee-house, at the bookseller's, dropping a crown for yourself and each of your honour's family at each place. The music will be after you once more, and they expect half-a-

guinea. After that to the tea-rooms, where breakfast is served; in fine weather under the trees. If your worship on arrival is inclined to treat the whole company, that will not be taken amiss. Breakfast over, it is "de rigueur" that you go to prayers, and that you stay to salute the parson, and peruse his book of subscriptions.

After prayers, with what zest do the fiddles strike up, while the whole company turn out upon the walks! And then what gossip, what scandals, what shopping, what raffing, with a little quiet gambling for those inclined, or morning whist for the more sedate! At two you dine, and then when it suits you turn out in full dress for the music, tea-drinking, cards, conversation, and lawful gaming. Then there are public balls twice a week, at half-a-crown and a shilling, where the M.C. imposes upon you two successive partners for the minuet, while the rest look on and criticise your capers. At eight the country dances begin, the ladies ranged according to the table of precedence; tea is served at nine, and chairs, calashes, and clogs at eleven. With all this you have concerts, lectures, races, and love and gallantry thrown in ad lib.

And for company, have we not had the best in the land? Good Queen Anne, who paved our walks; later Prince Fred, with the amiable mother of infant George, Amelia and Cumberland to follow; and in due course the Royal brothers York and Gloucester, who were saluted with fireworks and a general illumination. Then we had Apollo, if you please, otherwise the King's famous Capellmeister, Mr. Handel. As for the peerage, to name them would exhaust the Red Book. The famous Dr. Johnson and his Scotch friend, the illustrious author of "Clarissa," the humorous Mr. Fielding—oh, we have had all the wits and all the fine gentlemen, too, I assure you. Beau Nash arranged our code of etiquette, Chesterfield approved our moral code.

And if all these glories are past, and the Wells no longer attract the fashionable crowd, so are they also unhaunted by crowds of trippers; no music-hall songs are yelled along its pleasant, cheerful streets. But what pretty girls you see, what families of charming children! Kent still sends her fair daughters to the Paris of the Weald. Good hop-growers make their pile and buy houses at the Wells; cultivators of cob-nuts and strawberries, as

they grow rich, take up their abode there. And what breezy commons there are, and what rocks! You might not think much of them in Wales, but in Kent they are marvellous. And what an altogether refreshing place it is, with rest for the weary and vigour for the jaded, and peace and comfort to all within its ample circumference. And if its waters are out of fashion, there is always its delicious air, that none of the winds that blow in other places have quite the secret of.

REGRET.

Low is the stream,
The swifts fly low;
A curtain of cloud is over the sky,
And the thrushes, that sang so blithesomely,
In the reedy coverts come and go,
Chanting in fragments fitfully
A dolorous understrain of woe.
The millpool frowns with an angry gleam
And a menace of death in the depth below,
Cold shivers of deathly anguish pass
Through the long lean leaves of the river grass,
As over the water the distant chime
Of the tolling death-bell beats in time
To my sad heart mazed in a mist-like dream
Of the dear dead days of years ago—
By the low-banked stream
Where the swifts fly low.

A SELF-MADE MARTYR.

A COMPLETE STORY.

"SHE won't have me, aunt," said my nephew, Fred Marchant.

I knew that. Had it been otherwise, Fred would not have come in so soon and so disconsolate.

"Why?" I asked.

"Am I a bill, that she is bound to give reasons for rejecting me?" returned Fred bitterly. "She doesn't love me, I suppose. I think I'll go into the garden and smoke it over."

I am a woman, but I am also a widow. His tone told me that it was advisable to let him have the last word.

"Do, dear," I said, "and take one of my poor Walter's cigars. It will perhaps soothe you better than your pipe."

Fred had been down to the Vicarage, ostensibly to play lawn-tennis; really, as I guessed before he started, to ask the Vicar's daughter the question which had been on the tip of his tongue for the last fortnight, and I was surprised at the answer she had given him.

I don't pretend that I liked Amy even then; but I thought I understood her, and I had never credited her with any special aptitude for flirtation. She had

certainly encouraged Fred, though—openly when first she knew him, and lately in a tantalising way so eminently calculated to effect its apparent purpose, that it would have been inexcusable in any girl who had a mother to help her; but Mr. Willis was a widower, and one must make allowances.

Unless, then, she was a flirt of the most dangerous class—and I could not think that; poor Amy is too emotional (tender-hearted, Fred calls it) to play the part with success—what did she mean by her inconsistent conduct? Fred was four-and-twenty. He has, luckily for him, nine hundred a year independent of his profession; he has been called to the bar, but seems to enjoy unlimited leisure, some part of which he pretends to devote to the pursuit of literary fame. He is handsome and good-tempered. What more could the daughter of a poor country Vicar expect? She did not, I was sure, dislike him. In short, I was puzzled, and I made up my mind to get to the bottom of the mystery.

To solve mysteries one must have some facts to work upon, and there are rejections and rejections. I had not the least idea what sort of a rejection Fred's had been, so when he came in to supper I set to work to find out.

"Fred," I said, "which do you think would suit me best, Malvern, Cheltenham, or Harrogate? To live in, I mean?"

Fred was fond of going about the country on a bicycle—to study character and pick up bits of local colour, he used to say—and he liked one to assume that he was a sort of animated guide-book.

"Well," he replied, "the air of Malvern isn't bad, but you won't like the hills. It's all up and down. Cheltenham would be much too warm for you in the summer, and as for Harrogate—but why do you ask? You surely don't think of leaving Westerby? I thought you liked the—the—church and all that, you know, so much."

The hasty substitution of church for another word was obvious, but I did not resent it. I believe the poor boy was afraid of making me blush.

"Certainly; I like both the Church and the Vicar," I replied, partly to put him at his ease, and partly to let him know how easily I could read him. "I was thinking of you. After this you won't care to come here often; at least, not while Amy Willis remains unmarried."

"But, aunt," he cried, "I haven't abandoned hope. I smoked it well over—really those cigars of poor Uncle Walter's do cheer a fellow up wonderfully—and I determined to have another try. Not now, of course, but perhaps at Christmas. I don't think there's any one else, because she said she should never marry; but never's a long time, isn't it? Don't you go and deprive Westerby of the light of your gracious presence on my account, I beg."

My mystery was half solved already. The girl who tempers her coldness to her lover by telling him that other men must also sigh in vain, is assuredly possessed of the spirit of self-sacrifice. It only remained to discover on what particular altar Amy meant to immolate herself.

"Does she want to become a trained nurse, Fred?" I asked.

"Not that I know of," said Fred, apparently surprised at my question.

"Or to join the Zenana mission?" I went on.

"I don't think so," said Fred. "But, by Jove! aunt, I believe you are on the right track. Perhaps I spoke rather hastily just now. I was too much cut up at first to think clearly, but, hang it all, I can't believe she doesn't care for me. Why, only the other day she——"

I spare the reader the long catalogue of trifling favours accorded to my nephew, on divers occasions, by the object of his affections which he inflicted upon me. I was sure she loved him before he began—but men never seem to understand that there is no need to prove a thing one already believes, and I did not interrupt him.

"No. It isn't hospital work and it isn't Zenana," he went on, when he had finished strengthening his failing faith. "But I'll tell you what it is, aunt. It's her father."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

The dear Vicar was one of the most sensible men I ever met, and I could not believe that he objected to what was a most excellent match for a very ordinary girl.

"Why, she thinks it is her duty to stay with him—be the comfort of his declining years, and so on," replied Fred.

"What nonsense!" I exclaimed.

Mr. Willis was in the prime of life, and looked so much younger than his years, that no one would have imagined he had a daughter who was nearly of age. He reminded me in many respects of my poor Walter. That is, if the late Mr. Parminter had been a clergyman—he was a wine

merchant—and had been spared, I think he would have mellowed into just such a man; but if I had been taken and had left Mr. Parminter with an only daughter, I hope he would not have been afraid of her.

It was the Vicar's one fault. He was not master of his own household. Amy was—nay, is—of a very jealous disposition, and even in the early days of our intercourse she grudged her father the consolations of my friendship. Lately the Vicar's feelings towards me had ceased to be merely fraternal, and the poor man's struggles to conceal the change in them had been pitiful to see—but I fear I am stretching the thread of my conversation with my nephew to breaking point. Let me resume it ere it snaps.

"I don't see where the nonsense comes in," said Fred, almost sulkily. "The Vicar is getting old, and it's just the sort of noble, unselfish conduct one might expect from a girl like Amy. But I'll tell you what I'll do, aunt. Go away to-morrow for a month's tour—I can't write while this is on my mind—and then I'll try my luck again. I wonder if you will help me?"

"What do you want me to do?" I asked. I didn't feel at all sure that helping the boy would be any real kindness to him. I was not anxious for him to marry Amy—but then there was the dear Vicar to consider. Once freed from his daughter's tyranny my heart told me he would soon speak, but as I did not yet know what answer I would give him, I thought it safest not to commit myself.

"Well," said Fred, with some confusion of manner, "you could sound her, you know, and if you find it's all right you might hint that I shouldn't want her to leave Westerby. As my wife she could see nearly as much of her father, and keep quite as keen an eye on the parish work, as she does now."

"So she could," said I, concealing my amusement at his simplicity in supposing that Amy's enthusiasm for parish work would survive marriage. "But come, Fred, be candid. Wouldn't you like me to marry the Vicar myself, and so relieve Amy of the necessity of mounting guard over him?"

"By Jove, aunt!" he cried. "You ought to have been a thought-reader. How did you guess I was half wishing you would?"

"Why half, Fred?" I asked.

"Well," he explained, stammering and blushing, "you like him, I know, as a friend and—and a Vicar—but I don't think

he's the sort of man to make you happy as a husband."

The ideal husband a father would choose for his daughter, a brother for his sister, or even a nephew for his aunt, is as yet unborn and likely to remain so. Even if I had been quite convinced myself of the Vicar's ability to console me for my loss, I knew that Fred was as much prejudiced against the father as he was infatuated with the daughter, so I did not argue the point, but assured him that I would not dream of endangering my happiness for his convenience, and promised that, if circumstances threw in my way a chance to advance his interests, I would not neglect to avail myself of it.

What were his interests, though? Amy was a fussy, sanguine girl, much too fond of her own way to make a man happy for long. Her father had only been Vicar of Westerby about a year, and in that time she had turned the parish upside down with her fads. She had made the work in the Sunday-school so hard with her system of marks and prizes—which aroused a most unhealthy spirit of emulation in the children—and her strictness about attention and attendance, that I had resigned my class. As for the mothers' meeting—well, I can't go into details in a story meant for general reading, but the medical lore she displayed in the advice she had the impudence to give those women about the rearing of children was positively startling. In short, she wasn't at all the wife I would have chosen for any one who valued a quiet life, but what was the use of trying to persuade Fred that my knowledge of her was to his as a well to a puddle?

He saw that she had reddish hair, but no; he didn't even see that, he called it bright chestnut; bluish-gray eyes, which she knew how to use, on him; a pink-and-white complexion; a ready blush, except at mothers' meeting; an animated though self-conscious manner—I am wrong again, he had failed to detect the self-consciousness; and a passably pretty face. Out of these commonplace facts he had built up an astounding piece of fiction, which I dare say he honestly believed to be but an incomplete inventory of Amy's mental and bodily charms.

Was it to his interest to let him marry her and discover the truth? I thought not, but as I felt sure that, whatever I might do, she would take him as soon as she was tired of playing the martyr, and also realised that there were at least two people

in the world besides this pair of silly lovers, I resolved to act, if the opportunity for action came to me, solely on behalf of those other two, that is to say, the dear Vicar and myself.

Something soon happened which not only strengthened my resolve but gave me a chance to put it into practice. Amy grossly, though perhaps unintentionally, insulted me at the mothers' meeting. There was a poor woman there who was nursing twins, and as she was going away I gave her some good advice.

"You should take plenty of stout, Mrs. Jenkins," I said. "The best brown, mind. A quart a day would not be a drop too much."

"Thank you kindly, mum," said Mrs. Jenkins, dropping a curtsy. "But how be I to get it?"

"Why, by going to the 'Blue Boar,' I should think!" I replied—really the stupidity of agricultural labourers' wives is something beyond belief—and I was just about to tell her she must make sure she wasn't imposed upon, by examining the labels on the bottles, when Amy interrupted me.

"Mrs. Jenkins," she said, "be sure you call at the Vicarage for that mutton-broth I promised you. And be quick, because cook is going out."

The woman dropped another curtsy and left the room before I had time to begin again. Then Amy turned to me.

"Oh, Mrs. Parminster!" said she, looking reproachfully at me. "I am so sorry you advised that poor thing to take stout! She needs every penny she has for food."

"Well, my dear," I replied, with a pleasant smile—I always did my best to be civil to the girl—"what better food could she buy?"

"But, Mrs. Parminster," said she, also with a smile, but it was a superior one, and by no means pleasant, "alcohol is not food, and all the best authorities"—she quoted half-a-dozen names I never heard of—"discourage the use of stimulants in such cases. A mother needs nourishment, and—"

My temper is naturally placid, but I couldn't stand there and be lectured by a girl, especially on such a subject.

"Thank you, Miss Willis," I interrupted her, "I know perfectly well what a mother needs. I have been one myself. There I have the advantage of you—at least, I suppose so."

So anxious was I to avoid quarrelling

with Amy, if only for her father's sake, that I left the room immediately after making this remark, and walked home by myself. The minx had quite upset me, and I felt that I could not trust myself to speak to her again. Authorities, indeed! When my little Willie was born, old Dr. Doddrell, who was an authority if you like, advised me to take a light tawny port as well as stout, and poor Mr. Parminter ransacked the vaults at the docks to find one to suit me. He and the good doctor went on a tasting expedition every day for a week before they laid their hands on the exact brand for my constitution—but there, I have not space to indulge in reminiscences, however interesting.

Would you believe that Amy went home in tears, and told her father that I had been very rude to her? She did, though, and there is no knowing what mischief she might have caused if the Vicar had not, like the dear, fair-minded man that he is, come up in the evening to hear my version of the affair. I had quite recovered my equanimity over a cup of tea, and out of pity for him I suppressed the details of the quarrel—if quarrel it could be called—and said that I was quite willing to forgive and forget, if only Amy would promise never again to parade her teetotalism in my presence.

"You see, Mr. Willis," I concluded, "as a woman with something like ten thousand pounds in brewery shares, I can't be expected to stand that. By the way, will you have a glass of wine?"

"You dear, good-hearted soul," said he, "I will."

The warmth of his tone startled me. Could he have made up his mind?

A glance at his face convinced me that he had. His eyes shone with the most ardent admiration. I lowered mine, and, to cover my confusion, rose to pour out the wine. My hand shook, and some was spilt on the cloth. The Vicar sprang to my side and began to mop up the drops with his handkerchief. Simultaneously I did the same with mine. Somehow our fingers became intertwined, and before I could realise what was happening, his arm was round my waist and his lips were pressed to mine.

I made no attempt to repulse him. Instinctively I felt he had done the right thing in a most satisfactory way. To tell the truth, a good deal of the hesitation I had felt about accepting him, if ever he should summon up courage to propose,

had sprung from my fear that he would ask me to be a mother to Amy.

During the years of my widowhood several men had proposed to me, and they had all mentioned their motherless children, except one who was a bachelor, and spoilt his chance by expressing doubts of his ability to compensate me for the loss of Mr. Parminter. I was, therefore, agreeably surprised by the Vicar's method of declaring himself, though after all I need not have been. My first husband, as I have said, was just such another man, and he too took my heart by storm in a very similar way.

I knew of course that, as Mrs. Willis, it would be my duty to assume the responsibilities of the first holder of the title, but sentiment, I think, demands that on such an occasion previous contracts on either side should be for the moment ignored.

Unfortunately, their consequences cannot be ignored for more than the moment. We sat in bliss for an hour, and then I felt it was time to face the difficulties, or rather the one difficulty, in our path.

The Vicar, emboldened by his success, had been urging me to name an early day. I had not the least objection to do so, but I resented the frequent allusions to our time of life with which he sought to strengthen his pleadings.

"But, Henry," said I, interrupting a totally unnecessary appeal to my common sense, "what about Amy?"

"Bless me!" he exclaimed. "I had forgotten her."

My heart positively fluttered with delight, and I would have rewarded this proof of the absorbing nature of his affection with—well, in the usual way, if the love-light in his eyes had not instantly begun to fade.

"Surely you are not afraid of her?" I asked, in a tone calculated to arouse his manliness.

"Well, no, my dear. Of course not," he replied, and I am sorry to say his looks belied his words. "But as I hardly dared to hope you would ever deign to smile upon me, I never thought it worth while to risk upsetting her by confiding my—er—feelings to her. Really, if you don't mind—where ignorance is bliss, you know—I beg your pardon, my love, of course I don't mean that exactly. I have no doubt, dear, Amy will very soon learn to appreciate you; but don't you think it would be better to be able to tell her that

we are married, instead of letting her know that we intend to be?"

I was not prepared for such a suggestion, and I spoke rather sharply to poor Henry, but he stuck to his point with an obstinacy for which I was not prepared, and at last I determined to let him have his way.

"Very well, dear," said I, "it shall be as you wish; but as a secret engagement is always liable to misconstruction, the sooner ours comes to an end the better."

What idiots even the best of men are! He thought I wanted to break it off, and I had to tell him plainly that he must marry me that day month, or not at all, before he came to his senses.

I went to Torquay the next day, and we were married there at the time I had fixed, quite quietly, of course. Not until after the ceremony did we write to Fred and Amy, informing them of our union. How differently people are constituted! When Fred received his letter—on account of my absence from home he had prolonged his tour—he hurried back to Westerby by the first train, and found Amy nearly broken-hearted. At least, that is what he says.

He admits that, personally, he thought our letter—we wrote and signed it jointly—contained the best news he ever heard in his life, and yet he maintains that we ought to have had more consideration for Amy.

Consideration for Amy, indeed! Why, it was one of my motives for consenting to keep our engagement secret. I was sure she would object to it out of sheer jealousy, and I thought I would spare her a month's heart-burning. Moreover, she proved how little she deserved any consideration whatever by marrying Fred openly, in Westerby parish church, before all the assembled village, on the morning of the day we returned from our honeymoon.

Of course it was done out of spite, and I am sorry to say we were a good deal annoyed—for one thing, when we arrived the bells were dumb because the ringers were drunk—but the annoyance was only temporary, and was more than counter-balanced by the satisfaction I felt when I heard that Fred and Amy had decided to make their home in London. Just at first people seemed to have some idea that Amy had been badly treated by her father, but, as even the few enemies I had in the place were too full of curiosity not to call, I easily explained away that absurd notion.

Everybody whose opinion is worth anything says I was quite right not to humiliate myself by telling the Vicar of the state of affairs between Amy and Fred, or, in other words, trying to persuade him that his daughter would not, after all, be so very angry with him for dreaming of marrying again.

All my friends, moreover, think that the story of my second marriage ought to teach all young girls, but especially widowers' daughters, to make quite sure, before sacrificing themselves to filial affection, that the sacrifice is necessary; and, therefore, I make no apology for publishing it.

ABOUT THE FLEMINGS.

THE tourist travelling over the network of railway lines between Ghent and Lille, and with no scruples to keep him from sitting side by side with the people—and especially the market-women—of the country in a third-class carriage, might well fancy he was in Holland, a good many miles to the north.

The physiognomy of his companions is distinctly Dutch. They are also of the conventional Dutch build, massive in the extreme without being positively ungainly, and they carry Dutch noses and Dutch double chins to their faces. If there is anything in the world more enjoyably farcical than an average Dutch countenance in repose, the writer does not know it. This adds to the piquancy of the experience in this Flemish third-class carriage.

Moreover, the language spoken is as nearly Dutch as it can be without being actually the tongue taught at Leyden; and the heavy gestures which accompany it are just those used by the Dutch burgher when in earnest argument. And lastly, the landscape is remarkable for its unvarying flatness, and the witness it bears to the indefatigable industry of the local cultivators: herein resembling the stereotyped Dutch landscape.

It is, in fact, the land of the Flemings, a people who deserve to be better known than they are outside their own somewhat restricted homeland.

There are an astonishing number of them to the square mile. The geography books teach us this; but the lesson is brought home much more emphatically from the window of a railway train. Yet half a millennium ago it is probable the

population here was even denser than it now is. Certainly it was so as far as the Flemish towns are concerned. It is enough to read the chronicles of Froissart to realise this, and to marvel at the fertility of the land in human beings.

Still, even now Flanders is remarkable in this respect. The hedgeless fields and hop-gardens, the patches of roots and tobacco plants teem with workers. Men, women, and children of both sexes are busy with the harvest, and they seem to have that desirable faculty of concentration which helps so strongly towards prosperity. What is it to them if the train passes through their midst? They do not lift their heads to stare at it. Even the hop-pickers—comfortably settled to their work upon chairs evidently built to sustain serious burdens—do not use this slight opportunity for momentary relaxation.

Dotted among the parti-coloured fields—with an emphatic tendency to be stiff-soiled—are the red and white houses of the peasantry. They are cleanly and picturesque rather than obtrusive, although as a rule they stand nakedly upon the land, with no garnish of ornamental trees hugging their precincts. No unbecoming excrescence is allowed upon their walls, even as no useless weed or parasite is permitted to trespass upon the area consecrated to the support of the family. The very pig of the establishment must here behave himself, and keep his unhallowed impulses duly within bounds. For is he not a pig in an orderly land, where the maxim "Waste not, want not" is written in letters of gold upon the heart of each honest Fleming, as soon as he is able to read letters in intelligible conjunction?

The towns and villages of Flanders are alike interesting, though in a more forcible way than the country districts traversed by the railway. The former often possess churches much more grandiose than the size of the towns themselves seems to justify. Hardly are you across the frontier from France than the majestic towers of Poperinghen excite the traveller's admiration. One is fain to ask oneself: "Poperinghen, Poperinghen? What is the history of the place? Ought it perchance to be coupled with Cologne, and Rheims, and Strasburg; and is our British ignorance of it merely an error on the part of our insular geographers?" But other towns come into view one after the other, each with its stately places of worship; and

many of them bear names as unfamiliar to the stranger as Poperinghen.

This trait is really due to the decay of the towns themselves, rather than to local extravagance or enthusiasm in church-building. The churches were founded and raised centuries ago, when there were two or three times as many Flemings to the square mile as there are now. Ghent, for example, though still sufficiently famous, is nothing to what it was. Its railway station is assuming, and so are the residential houses near it; but both would befit the city as it was when the Dukes of Burgundy found it so sturdy an opponent, better than they befit it in our century—though, to be sure, it is a bold stroke of fancy to conceive the Ghent of 1400 or 1450 endowed with a railway.

Ypres is in the same case with Ghent. The towers of its churches rise above the houses with the grace and strength of cathedrals. There is something fascinating in the sound of these mediæval chimes prattling melodiously every hour above the heads of the business men and factory girls of the present. Five hundred years ago Ypres had two hundred thousand inhabitants. Barely a tenth as many now find a livelihood in its circuit.

Courtrai deserves to be coupled with Ypres. Its cathedral church of St. John should be seen, if only for the masterly modern frescoes which dignify its old walls, and the bright, many-coloured stucco work upon its altars. Courtrai is better off than Ypres, inasmuch as it has industries which keep its blood pulsing in its veins. Its large hotels contrast touchingly with the humble inns of Ypres, and if you chance to be in its streets at the dinner-hour you will see a surprising number of clean-faced work-girls, not all of whom wear the look of calm stolidity which one fancies is indigenous in Flanders.

In the villages one comes into vigorous acquaintance with the singular individuality of the rural Fleming. He is commonly a man with a very limited number of aspirations, and no very marked amount of native courtesy. At a venture, you would set him down as a boor unmitigated; especially if you had chanced to sit with him at his ease for a spell. One of his worst points is his habit of expectoration. I fancy he beats the average American in his recklessness in this particular. He treats the churches just as he treats the village pot-house or the railway carriage.

The women, though absurd in their un-

wildness, are more engaging than the men. This is not wonderful, since the same may be said of their sisters elsewhere. It is natural, moreover, that they should be more sympathetic.

I proved this latter point experimentally the other day at the hamlet called Gode-waersvelde, which is nearly on the frontier between France and Belgium. I was deposited at this insignificant hamlet late at night, having been heartlessly deceived by divers trains; and was for a time doubtful if I should not be forced to beg the use of the waiting-room at the railway station for a bedchamber.

There is a certain great red monastery of a modern kind on a hill a mile and a half from the village, and thither I had designed to go for the night—having years back contracted a taste for monkish hospitality. But at so late an hour the idea was absurd. The station-master informed me in excellent French that the monks were all abed, and would not enjoy being aroused for so trivial a purpose. Besides, it was raining heavily, the night was black as coal, and the road is not at all a good one. It only remained, therefore, to seek accommodation somewhere, as the last train in either direction had departed.

This was the beginning of trouble, and even anxiety. The first three "estaminets" at which I applied declined to have anything to do with me. An "estaminet," by-the-bye, is not an inn, but a low sort of eating and drinking house. The average Belgian village has about half as many "estaminets" as houses. The hosts of these Godewaersvelde "estaminets" were, it may be, civil in repudiation of me, but the civility was not in the tone of their voices, and the rigmarole which accompanied their negatives was incomprehensible to me.

So half an hour passed. Then I reached a fourth "estaminet." I was given to understand that this was my last chance. It was to be here or nowhere. But here also it soon appeared that no room was vacant. The master of the house—he was a draper and much else besides—was sorry; and with this ineffectual regret he would have had me go about my business. There was a young man in the room whose sample cases proclaimed him a commercial traveller. He was amused at my predicament. He showed it by his unvarnished smiles, and the diverted way in which he stirred the sugar in the grog he was imbibing ere retiring to his bed.

I was vexed, because really I had had

enough of the Flemish rain and the Flemish mud, and besides, I could not open my mouth without yawning. And I proclaimed my vexation in the most barbarous French I could evolve from my brain, fancying that its very uncouthness might touch their hearts. Happily my adjectives reached the ears of the landlady of the house, an enormous, good-natured woman. She hurried into the room and cross-examined her husband, with her sympathetic eyes upon me. And it was due entirely to her and the complaisance of the young bagman that I was lodged here after all. I shared the young bagman's room, which held two beds. We spent about two minutes in mutual courteous objections to the better bed of the two, which in the end fell to my lot, simply, I believe, because I was powerless before my companion's superior command of his own language. I was quite content. There were Madonnas on the walls of the room; the sheets were clean; and certainly it seemed better to share a room with a young and inoffensive-looking stranger, rather than have no bed.

In the morning Godewaersvelde declared itself more profitably. Lumpish, angular yokels in blue smocks were lounging at the road corner where the "estaminet" was built. They looked as if their noses and bodies as a whole had been dislocated—so ridiculous were their attitudes and facial outline. A little girl, daughter of my hospitable landlady, was squatted in ungainly fashion in the cartway, alternately sifting cinders and refixing her disarranged hair. She was a typical Flemish lass: yellow of locks and with light-blue eyes. Other little girls like her could be seen plodding towards the neat-spired church just behind the "estaminet"; but their pig-tails were spruce and trim, and their faces glistened with the exertions of the recent matutinal wash. There were dogs idling among the men: limp, dejected creatures, in singular keeping with their masters. The sight of this general inertness recalled the recent words of a "smart" Transatlantic visitor who had said that Europe was very well, but that the people wanted tickling a bit. These Flemings were distinctly like Europe in this lady's opinion. But what grotesque contortions the practice of such a delightful liberty would have produced in them!

The red-roofed little houses sprawled away from the cross-roads, some towards the gay monastery on the hill, others in the

direction of the church. Towards the monastery the grain of the fields was ready for the sickle, and the hops stood twelve and fifteen feet high. There was no lack of fertility in evidence. But the rain of the night had turned the highway into a bog that did not invite exploration. The trees, also, dripped moisture in steady lines. It seemed better to leave the modern monastery to itself and return towards the heart of the village. The bland, vacuous stares of the idlers were enough to seriously indispose a weak-minded person. They looked upon me with a fish-like, rather than a human, expression. Doubtless, however, sensibility and thought were at work beneath their torpid exteriors.

The "mairie," or town hall of Godewaersvelde, is a tiny little cottage set among the other cottages of the hamlet, facing the church across the village green. There cannot be much municipal business in so small a place. The dames stood gossiping at their doors while feeding their poultry in public, or despatching their offspring towards the church porch over the way. Here the gathering of little Flemings was great for the size of the village. And anon, when they had sufficiently diverted themselves with staid talk and posturing, the children entered the church and formed themselves into a square in the north transept, where the curé stood awaiting them, book in hand.

You would have thought the presence of a stranger—and especially a foreigner—in the church would have been hailed by the village scholars as a most welcome distraction from the restraint of the catechism. But it did not seem to affect them in the least. The curé was evidently much more sensitive. The youngsters stared straight before them, and responded in that sing-song chorus which is so thoroughly suggestive of tongue service and dormant intelligences. And yet it was an inspiring, well-kept little church, with good honest colouring on its ceiling, and woodwork about its nave in harmony with the solidity of character of the Fleming himself. The clock in the belfry striking the hour was equally impotent to pique the wits of these sober little representatives of the coming generation.

Though Godewaersvelde is a village of France, there is about as much affinity between a Parisian and a Hottentot as between a Parisian and a local Fleming. From some aspects the contrast would be favourable to the Parisian. But one is

prone to think there must be compensation somewhere for the native of Godewaersvelde, as for the rustic Fleming in general. It may lie in the fact that he is innately as honest as he is apparently ridiculous.

No man need think himself wronged who pays but a couple of francs for his bed and his breakfast. It were ungenerous in the extreme to fancy that this leniency on the part of the Godewaersvelde innkeeper was due to a defect of intellect rather than a virtue of the heart.

I am willing to believe these Flemings of Godewaersvelde were types of their rural brothers and sisters elsewhere in the land.

ZENOBIA: A COMMONPLACE GIRL.

A STORY IN NINE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER III.

FRANCIS DEVONDALE had resolved that, despite Slowton ways and Slowton prejudices, he would follow up his introduction to Zenobia and learn to know her better; but several days passed, and still no opportunity presented itself of which he could make use to bring about the meeting he so much desired. Save for one momentary glimpse at the window he never even saw her, nor did his increased knowledge of Slowton society give him any reason to hope for better fortune in the future.

But the young man was far from being discouraged by the difficulties which, to a Slowton youth in his position, would have appeared insuperable. His spirits rose with his realisation of all the adverse circumstances that he would have to reckon with, and his determination to have his own way only became the more unalterably fixed when he found that this would be no easy matter. But he was in no hurry; he had plenty of time before him, and could afford to wait; and, in the meanwhile, the house on the opposite side of the road was an unfailing source of interest to him and his young charge. For Cecil regarded Zenobia in the light of those lovely heroines of whom he had read in many an old romance. Her beauty, and her loneliness, and the shy yet proud manner—so utterly unlike that of the silly, self-asserting girls with whom alone he was able to compare her—had appealed to the boy's imagination and won his heart. All the fancies and dreams of his long hours of enforced idleness were filled with thoughts

of Zenobia; she was his enchanted princess, his stately queen of love and beauty, his high ideal of perfect womanhood. Now, for the first time, he had found a friend who could understand and sympathise with him in his silent worship; and tutor and pupil got on so well together that the boy's parents were as much astonished as delighted, and felt assured that at last they had succeeded in solving the perplexing problem of Cecil's education.

At the end of a week Mr. and Mrs. Paxton went away for a few days, and Mr. Devondale promptly availed himself of the opportunity thus offered to call upon the Brabournes. He would have done so before, but as the social code of Slowton seemed to be a somewhat peculiar one, he thought it better to abstain from mentioning his intention to Mrs. Paxton lest she should inform him that tutors were not expected—or required—to pay calls, and that Mrs. Brabourne would regard it as a liberty on his part were he to do so.

He crossed the road, therefore—watched cautiously by Cecil's envious eyes—and knocked boldly at the door of the forbidding-looking mansion where the lovely princess was imprisoned. A young and rather pretty maid-servant responded to his summons.

"Mrs. Brabourne is not at home, sir, but she'll be in, I think, in a few minutes. Miss Brabourne is at home."

"I will come in, then," he said. How grateful he felt to kindly fate for at length favouring him so highly! "I suppose Miss Brabourne is disengaged?"

"Oh, yes, sir," with a demure smile.

Zenobia was very much disengaged. In her aunt's absence it was not necessary even to feign an interest in her carefully-chosen book, and the girl had thankfully let it slide to the floor, while she indulged in the unwonted luxury of doing nothing openly and with no reservations. She was not naturally either indolent or idle, but she was weary of perpetually toiling over trifles that could never be of the smallest practical use to anybody. She had no taste for the endless fancy work that her aunt, in common with most of the ladies of Slowton, considered the only suitable occupation for ladylike fingers; and she was aware, moreover, that she did it very badly.

Perhaps it was because Zenobia was feeling tired and bored on that particular afternoon, that she looked almost as much pleased as startled when Mr. Devondale

was announced. Evidently, Slowton customs had not prepared her to expect him.

"I fear your aunt must have thought me very discourteous for not having come before," he remarked; but Zenobia soon reassured him.

"Oh, no; she did not expect you to come. Only the ladies pay calls in Slowton. Did not Mrs. Paxton tell you?"

"To tell the truth," and he laughed, "I never asked her. You see I am a stranger, and I can't be expected to know all the local customs. I think in your town, Miss Brabourne, one grasps at the chance of a little pleasant society. I have only lived here ten days, but I would not lightly lose it; for, as you told me, it is not the Slowton way ever to know anybody any better."

"I suppose in other places people are much more friendly?"

"Why, yes; so far as my experience goes. In Oxford and London they certainly are."

"I wonder you stay here, then," she said slowly.

"You forget my bear."

"No; but surely you could find another in a pleasanter place."

"I assure you, for a young fellow like myself, this engagement isn't to be despised. To tell you the truth, my people and I have fallen out; I won't be what they wish, and they don't wish me to be what I want, and this bear-leading business is a sort of compromise. So long as I can make it work, they can't say much; and it is working at present beautifully."

"And you like Cecil?"

"Oh, immensely; he's an awfully clever little beggar, too, and has no end of ideas of his own. It's hard on him to be so crippled. Sometimes he can't leave his room for days together."

"It is very sad!" and her dark eyes were full of tender pity. "I did not know it was so bad as that; and he always looks so patient and good!"

"Couldn't you come over and see him sometimes? He'd like it awfully if you would!" said Mr. Devondale, speaking suddenly on the impulse of the moment.

"But—what good would that be to him? And what would Mrs. Paxton and my aunt say?"

"We must see about that; but, as to Cecil, I know it would do him all the good in the world. He has no sisters, you see, and though he's very fond of his

mother, she isn't much of a companion to him. Now you could talk to him about lots of things, and read with him—he's no end of a reader—and though he's only fourteen, he's very good company, I assure you. Would you mind coming, if the thing could be arranged?"

"I should like it, if he would really care to see me; but—I don't think I should interest him. I've very little conversation, I'm afraid."

"Cecil wouldn't think so. He told me the other day he couldn't bear people who talked when they'd nothing to say. He prefers 'little conversation' when that 'little' is to the point."

"And will Cecil always be so delicate?" Zenobia asked, looking earnestly at the strong, handsome young fellow before her, and contrasting him mentally with the wan face and slight figure of the crippled boy.

"Oh, I hope not. With care, they say, great improvement is probable; but, of course, he will always be lame."

Mr. Devondale had every opportunity of judging of Zenobia's powers of conversation during the twenty minutes or so that elapsed before Mrs. Brabourne's return; and his opinion was decidedly favourable. She did not say very much, perhaps, but then she never talked for the sake of talking; whatever she said was said sympathetically, and with real interest in the subject under discussion; and she was a most attentive and appreciative listener. Thus to converse with her gave him real pleasure, quite apart from the charm of her beauty and simplicity; and when Mrs. Brabourne at length appeared, the two young people were talking so pleasantly together that they never heard her approach, and Francis Devondale was actually laughing at the very moment when that formal-mannered lady opened the door.

"Zenobia, I understand—oh, Mr. Devondale, are you there? I am glad to see you. Ring for tea, Zenobia—or have you had it already? No! Then ring at once."

"We have not had it, for I thought you would be home before this," Zenobia said, as she complied with her request.

"Mr. Devondale, you will stay and have some tea? It will be up immediately. I met Mr. Priestley just now—our Rector, you remember—and he was making many enquiries after you. He wished to know if you were one of the Devondales of Dartmouth."

"Did he? He is a very interesting man, the Rector, and I hope I shall see more of him."

"He is most highly connected; his mother was a baron's daughter. He would, I think, be glad to find that you are one of the Devondales of Dartmouth."

"Would he? That's very kind of him. I must ask him about them," and then somehow he glided away from the subject in such a way that even Mrs. Brabourne did not venture to return to it again. Yet she did not appear to resent his silence on this point, for she continued to treat him with marked courtesy, and, for her, actual geniality. True, her manner was hardly calculated to give the young man so pleasant an impression; but Zenobia was better able to judge of it, and wondered greatly to find Aunt Martha so amiable. Mr. Priestley must certainly have given the Devondales of Dartmouth a most respectable character, or she would never have been so gracious to Cecil Paxton's tutor on the mere chance that he might prove to be one of them. The Rector was a power in Slowton, and his opinion always carried much weight; though less, it is to be feared, on account of his good common sense and excellent understanding, than of those "high connections" of whom all Slowton felt justly proud. "A well-known family; oh, yes, and wealthy, too; but eccentric—extremely eccentric;" such had been Mr. Priestley's summing up of the Devondales of Dartmouth, and it had struck Mrs. Brabourne's fancy amazingly. Despite her prim formality, too, the old lady was not altogether blind to the tutor's remarkably good looks, which she had distrusted at first as being really too good for his position; in fact, according to the narrow little theories of life that obtained in Slowton, he looked too distinguished a man to be quite a gentleman; but this suspicion once comfortably laid to rest, Mrs. Brabourne was ready to go to the opposite extreme, and regard him with all reverence as some disguised scion of a noble house, who was pleased for a time to lay aside his greatness, and comport himself as an ordinary everyday individual. For the present, this explanation satisfied her; but should it prove to be a delusion, life would go hard with that young and handsome tutor if Mrs. Brabourne had the ordering of it. Of all this, however, Zenobia knew nothing.

But, despite Mrs. Brabourne's utmost efforts, the half-hour that succeeded her

return was far less agreeable than that which had preceded it. So that Mr. Devondale was not led to prolong his visit unduly, and thereby offend against the unwritten code of Slowton good-breeding. He went, had he only known it, just at the right time, and Mrs. Brabourne pronounced him "an exceedingly gentlemanly young man," which was much—very much—for her to say; and of a tutor, too! But then the Devondales of Dartmouth! Ah, that implied so much! Why, it might mean almost anything—or nothing. Who could say which?

CHAPTER IV.

THE country round Slowton was not beautiful, as even the warmest admirer of that dreary little town was obliged to confess; it was flat and unlovely, and neatly mapped out in level fields, intersected by straight roads, bordered on either side by low, ruthlessly clipped hedges.

On this dull November afternoon, when every place looked its greyest and dreariest, the Slowton scenery was appallingly colourless and depressing; and Zenobia, walking along those straight, admirably kept roads, was certainly to be excused if life presented itself to her imagination in peculiarly unattractive hues, and nothing seemed really of any particular moment one way or the other.

The afternoon and the scenery were enough, without doubt, to account for her melancholy state of mind; and it would be invidious to enquire whether the fact that nearly a week had passed since Mr. Devondale's visit, and she had not so much as seen him in the interval, had anything to do with the universal lack of light and colour. Such, however, might well be the case; though, of course, had such an idea been suggested to the girl herself, she would indignantly have denied it. To do so, under the circumstances, would have been both right and natural.

Presently Zenobia paused, and surveyed the dismal landscape with sadly questioning eyes. Was all her life to be passed amid these wearisome, monotonous scenes? Were all her days to be as flat and uninteresting as these low-lying, dreary meadows, from which the chill white mists were already beginning to rise? It was not an inspiring prospect, and she turned from it with a little involuntary

shiver, and began hastily to retrace her steps towards the town.

At the distance of a few paces from the place where Zenobia had been standing, another road crossed hers at right angles; and up this road—had she chanced to glance in that direction—she might have perceived the figure of a solitary pedestrian approaching from a little way off. But she did not once look towards him, and so never saw the eager gaze with which he was regarding her; or observed how he quickened his steps when he first caught sight of her standing there alone. So Zenobia went on her way in blissful unconsciousness; and he followed her at some little distance, debating with himself whether or not he should at once hasten forward and accost her, or wait till he should be sure of his ground, and more completely master of the situation. An accident presently helped him to decide the question.

There were not many people passing along the road Zenobia had chosen for her walk that afternoon, and, therefore, it was the more surprising that she should see Mr. Devondale, a few minutes after she had turned to go home, coming towards her from the town. She was about to pass him with a stately little bow, but he had not been hoping for this meeting for days past to have it cut so exceedingly short now.

"You are in great haste, Miss Brabourne," he said, with a smile. "May I walk back a little way with you just to tell you of our grand idea, Cecil's and mine?"

"If you are going my way——"

"I am," promptly, as she hesitated, "with your permission. It seems such an age since we met, that I fear you may have forgotten our talk about the boy."

"Oh, no; indeed, I remember every word of it!" she protested eagerly.

"And you have not repented your good-nature? I hope not, for I believe Mrs. Paxton is going to take advantage of it."

"Does she wish me to come and see Cecil? I shall be very glad to do so," she said, in the slightly formal manner that contrasted so pleasantly with the free-and-easy familiarity of many of the girls of his acquaintance; good fellows enough in their way, but terribly addicted to slang, and occasionally a little lacking in refinement. Zenobia never talked slang; she did not even know any to talk, which was a great comfort.

"She does indeed. The boy has set his heart on it. You know he has been ill again!"

"No; I am so sorry."

"I thought, as you live so near, you were sure to have heard."

"Not in Slowton. To be near is a very different thing from being neighbourly."

"It seems so, certainly; but we will try to cultivate a better spirit, you and I," he said, feeling that no task undertaken in such companionship could possibly be too hard for him.

Zenobia smiled, partly, it may be, from pity of his ignorance, and partly from pleasure at the idea of mutual helpfulness his words suggested to her. After all, there would be no harm in trying, though she had lived in Slowton too long to be in any way sanguine as to the result. No harm to the general community, certainly, and much satisfaction to the individual Zenobia, whose ideas were becoming considerably enlarged as she listened to the boldly impracticable suggestions of this young and light-hearted tutor. He had such a gay, careless way of discussing the solemn Slowton customs, that she found her own superstitious respect for them steadily decreasing as she walked along beside him; not saying much, perhaps, but, for that very reason, thinking the more.

Meantime, all unperceived by them, that solitary pedestrian followed along the dull road, now drearier than ever as the short November afternoon began to darken into night. But Zenobia no longer found the scene depressing or colourless; she no longer thought anything about it, so interested was she in her companion's plans for the future, and so interested was she—though as yet she was far from grasping this fact in its full significance—in himself.

"Then when Mrs. Paxton offers you this rare opportunity of improving your knowledge of English men of letters, and those works by which you ought especially to know them, you will take the proposal into your favourable consideration?" he asked, with a laugh.

"I will, certainly, and I hope my aunt will approve."

"She will be conferring a favour, you see, and Mrs. Paxton, as I believe, doesn't often ask favours. That clock is actually striking half-past four! I'd no idea it was so late. I fear I must be turning back."

"Why, I thought you were going my way?"

"So I was, but I must go Mrs. Paxton's now, for she asked me to give a message for her at a farm over there, a little beyond where I met you, and I said I'd be back by five. Good-bye, and don't forget Cecil."

"No fear of that," she said. "Tell him I like his plan very much."

"He'll be delighted. Thanks—for us both," he added, with unwonted earnestness, and a glance that brought the colour to Zenobia's pale, sweet face, and a new light to her eyes.

So they parted.

Zenobia pursued her way to the town, the outskirts of which she was already approaching, while Mr. Devondale rapidly retraced his steps by the road they had come together but a few minutes before, wishing—oh, how devoutly!—that Mrs. Paxton and her message were both sunk "full fathom five," to the bottom of the sea. It was an unkind and illogical wish on his part, since he ought in common justice to have remembered that, though Mrs. Paxton's message now compelled him to leave Zenobia, but for that same message he would not have met her at all. But when did man in love—and Francis Devondale was very seriously in love; of that he was fully persuaded in his own mind—ever remember anything of justice or logic, far less act reasonably in accordance with their suggestions, when compelled by a sense of duty to walk swiftly away from the beloved object?

Mr. Devondale, absorbed in his own reflections, passed that solitary figure on the road, scarcely seeing him in the deepening twilight. There was nothing remarkable in the man's appearance to attract the attention of a casual observer, though any one accustomed to read the faces of his fellow-men might have found one here that would well repay perusal. Not a good face at all, and yet with something not wholly unattractive in the dark eyes, and firmly-cut mouth and chin. A man with a certain amount of character, undoubtedly; though possibly that character would not go far to gain him a good name in the world—at least in such a select, respectable world as that of Slowton.

He glanced at Mr. Devondale sharply as he passed, then paused, and watched him as he strode quickly away till his tall figure was lost in the twilight.

"Like, very like," he muttered. "If

only it were not so confoundedly dark, and I could have seen——" he broke off abruptly, and quickened his steps, so that in a few minutes he overtook Zenobia just as she was turning into Queen Street.

She heard the hasty steps behind her, and looked round.

"Wait a moment," he said peremptorily, "I want to ask you a question."

His manner puzzled her, but she supposed he merely wished to ask his way in the town, and waited accordingly; though with her head carried a little higher than usual.

"Who was the man you were talking to just now?"

Zenobia started, as well she might, at this very abrupt enquiry, and turned her dark eyes questioningly upon the speaker.

Despite his shabby clothes, and general air of not too respectable poverty, there was something in his face that riveted her attention by its strange familiarity. She forgot to resent the impertinence of the question, and replied simply:

"Mr. Devondale."

"Frank Devondale?"

"Yes."

"Then I was right! And what is he doing here, and how come you to know him?"

Zenobia drew her slight figure to its full height, her grave eyes still fixed earnestly upon his face.

"By what right do you ask me this?" she said.

"By a better right than you can question. What is Frank Devondale doing here?"

And again the girl replied, though sorely against her will: "He is Cecil Paxton's tutor."

"A tutor!" and he laughed sardonically. "Devondale a tutor! Upon my soul, I shall take to the trade next! A pretty teacher of youth, truly! But he shall teach you no lessons, girl. Be assured of that!"

"I do not understand you," she said coldly.

Zenobia felt as if she must be dreaming. That this man, a stranger, should dare to address her thus; to dictate to her, Zenobia Brabourne, whom she should or should not know, and who should or should not teach her! And all this actually in decorous Queen Street, within a stone's throw of her uncle's respectable mansion! Oh, the thing was preposterous; manifestly absurd! She must be dreaming, surely! And there he stood all the while, and looked at her; a half-stern, half-humorous smile upon his worn but still handsome face.

"I do not understand you," she repeated; "and—and you have no right to speak to me in this way."

She turned to go, but he detained her.

"I have every right," he said, standing in front of her so that she could not pass; "and so you will acknowledge when you know me better."

"I have no wish to know you at all. Let me pass," she exclaimed.

"Unfortunately, I cannot consult your wishes in the matter. It seems to me quite time I came home to look after you. I've neglected my duty shamefully hitherto, but I'll see to it now—if only to thwart Devondale!"

"What do you mean? Who are you?" she asked, in her surprise and bewilderment.

He laughed strangely.

"I am Herbert Lovell—your father, Zenobia!"

And he turned away abruptly, and left her.

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